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Jill Stearns Selected President for Modesto Junior College

MODESTO, CA – Jill Stearns has accepted an offer by the Yosemite Community College District (YCCD) Board of Trustees to be the new president of Modesto Junior College (MJC) effective July 1, 2012. Stearns will replace Interim MJC President Dr. Mary Retterer, whose term ends June 30. YCCD Board Chair Mike Riley formally announced Ms. Stearns as MJC's next President at a special meeting of the Board today. The decision was unanimous.

"I am excited to become part of Modesto Junior College. MJC has an amazing 90 year history of strong academic programs, workforce development, and community education," commented Stearns on the announcement.

Stearns is currently Vice President of Educational Services and serves as Chief Instructional Officer at West Hills College in Coalinga, CA. She has served as the Vice President since 2006 and previously held positions in the West Hills Community College District as Interim Associate Dean of Student Learning and District Director of Financial Aid since 2004.

As Chief Instructional Officer, she established and strengthened relationships with community leaders, regional partners, local employers, and area schools. One example is a seven-year collaboration with Coalinga State Hospital where she developed strong working relationships with all levels of leadership at the hospital, developing and maintaining programs targeted to the hospital's needs. West Hills College trains psychiatric technicians and hospital peace officers through innovative programs that incorporate shared resources.

Prior to her roles in the community college system, Stearns had an extensive track record in business for nearly 15 years. She was the President and CEO of J. Stearns, Inc. (Coyote Chevron) and General Manager of Pecks, both located in Avenal, CA.

According to YCCD Chancellor Joan Smith, “Jill will be a great fit for MJC. It takes more than qualifications to be successful as a college president. Her references were outstanding.” Smith added, “She also has a strong background in higher education, accreditation, and instruction, and has successfully run her own business.”

Board Chair Mike Riley affirmed Chancellor Smith’s praise by saying, “Her strengths range from academics to the effective use of technology, and working with people. Jill is smart, strong, straightforward, and gives me great hope for long term stability in the leadership at MJC. Her commitment to excellence is a reflection of her values and her character.”

Stearns is close to completing her Ph.D. in Community College Leadership from Walden University. She received her Master of Science degree in Instructional Technology from National University (2002). Her Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Administration (1990) is from California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, CA.

According to Stearns, “Everyone I’ve met at Yosemite Community College District has been warm and welcoming. I look forward to working with the outstanding faculty and staff in support of student success.”

Stearns’ selection comes after a nationwide search conducted by Ralph Andersen and Associates. The search began on January 1. MJC Presidential forums were held in mid-April prior to Chancellor Smith and the Board interviewing the four finalists for the position.

Chancellor Smith commented, “The search committee did a wonderful job sending forward four qualified candidates. In addition, a site visitation was made by the Board Chair and Interim MJC President Mary Retterer.”

Modesto Junior College is one of the first community colleges established in California in 1921. MJC’s fall 2011 enrollment was 18,256 (unduplicated headcount). Modesto Junior College along with Columbia College comprise the Yosemite Community College District (YCCD). YCCD is one of 72 community college districts that make up the California Community College System – the largest system of higher education in the world, serving nearly three million students each year.

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